

Planned for God's Pleasure
40 Days of Purpose sermon series
Feb. 20, 2005
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Welcome to week 2 of our "40 Days of Purpose" campaign. Last week we asked the question, "What on earth am I here for?" and learned that we are all here so that God can love us. That's why we were created. Today we start looking at the five purposes God has for us, as outlined in Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Life." Today's purpose is that we were planned for God's pleasure.

Bringing enjoyment to God is our first purpose in life. We were created by God to be loved by God and to bring God pleasure. Just as a parent delights in a child, so God delights in us. Anything we do that brings pleasure to God is called "worship."

The purpose of our worship and any worship is to praise God. That is the sole reason we gather together. We don't come to church on Sunday mornings to hear a sermon or sing a song or see our friends or take communion. We come to praise God. Now all those other things help us to accomplish that. When we listen to a sermon, sing a song, fellowship with others, or take communion, we are in fact engaging in acts of praise. We praise God through our words and actions, through our relationships, through our presence. Faithfully coming to church each Sunday is itself an act of praise. It's like the bumper sticker I saw once: "If you love Jesus, go to church every Sunday. Any fool can honk."

So we gather here each Sunday to praise God. And for this gathering to be true worship, we must bring all of our being with us. Partial worship is not worship. Coming to church but not participating, listening to God's word but not living it, that's not acceptable. God doesn't want our weekly leftovers on Sunday; God wants our very best.

That's why worship is meant to be an activity. Passive worship is an oxymoron. The word "liturgy," which is used in some churches to describe their order of worship, is from a Greek word that literally means "the work of the people." Worship is work we do for God's pleasure. Did you hear all those verbs in Psalm 95? Sing, shout, bow, kneel. Is that worship or an aerobics class? There's a big difference between coming to worship and worshipping.

Jesus tells us this when he responds to the man's question about the greatest commandment. What's the Bible message in a nutshell? Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Give to God everything you have and everything you are; that is what brings God the most pleasure.

To love God with all your heart simply means to give God praise. We do that in our worship through music. Some people say that certain types of music are more "God-worthy" than others. There's even a category called praise music. But isn't all music directed toward God praise music? When we sing about God's amazing grace, when we thank God for walking closely with us, when we honor God as a mighty fortress or as holy, holy, holy, we are praising God.

Loving God with all our hearts also means being in love with God. I remember when I first met Leigh back in college. Man, was she pretty! Not as pretty as she is today, but she was pretty! And I couldn't stop thinking about her. In class, in the car, at work, all

I could think about was her. I was in love with her. When we're in love with someone, we can't stop thinking about them. That's what God wants from us, to always be in our hearts.

Jesus also commands us to love God with all our soul. For worship, that means to bring the essence of who we truly are to worship and be open to receiving God's gifts for us. God doesn't want us to put on airs when we come to his house; he wants us to come just as we are, including all our sins and shortcomings. Humility is a key to true worship. If we come to worship thinking we don't need anything from God, then we won't get anything. It's only those who come to worship looking for something, expecting something, that walk away transformed. The wonder of it all is that God asks us to bring all we have to worship then turns right around and gives everything back to us. His body broken. His blood shed. If we are willing to give God the good and the bad of our souls, God promises to give us all of himself, as well.

I'm really glad Jesus included the part about loving God with all our minds. Worship is often boiled down to an emotional experience with no room left over for intellectual worship. True worship requires a balance of both our head and our heart. There's one thing that God cannot have unless we give it to him, and that's our attention. Worshipping God requires us to pay attention to the words we are saying. If we are singing, don't just sing, think about the words. If we are praying, don't just repeat the words, mean them when you say them. When we were undergoing our spiritual makeovers last month we learned the importance of having big ears so that we could pay attention to each other. Paying attention to God in worship is an expression of love.

Finally, Jesus tells us to love God with all our strength. To me, this one is the most profound of all of them. First, it means that if we have strengths when it comes to worship, we are called to share them. If we have a gift that would bring pleasure to God, should we keep it hidden? If we are gifted singers, we should sing! If we have the gift of generosity, we should give! If we are warm and friendly, we should be first in line to greet new folks. If our strengths can be used in worship, then we should use them, because when we use the gifts God has given us, we bring God pleasure.

But there's an even deeper meaning to loving God with all our strength that I want to explore. Jesus talked about heart, soul, and mind; now I believe he's talking about our bodies. To worship God with our bodies goes far beyond Sunday morning.

We tend to restrict worship to Sunday morning, and that makes sense because that's how worship is usually defined for us. But our Sunday morning activities are only a small part of all that worship involves. Fundamentally, worship is not about church activities. Worshipping God is the process of giving ourselves completely to God in every sphere of life. It involves offering ourselves to God for His use, wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

Paul says in Romans 12: "Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing, to God – this is your spiritual act of worship." I absolutely love how Eugene Peterson translates this verse in *The Message*: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering."

True worship is a continuous offering to God of all that we have and all that we are, not just on Sunday morning, but every day. We are called to be living sacrifices, but

Rick Warren says the problem with living sacrifices is that they crawl off the altar! So every morning we need to remind ourselves to give our day to God as an act of worship.

When we think of God as being with us throughout the day, it becomes easier to see him as the object of everything we do. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." He says in Colossians, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

One way of doing this is learning to think of God in the second person instead of the third person. When we think of God as "he", it can almost be an abstraction, something far away. But thinking of God as "you" makes us aware of his constant personal presence, in the midst of all our daily activities. "This is for you, God." Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence. Everything we do can be spending time with God if we invite him to be a part of it. "This is for you, God."

Pastor David Shirey tells a story he heard about the building of the National Cathedral in Washington DC. One of the foremen on the construction crew noticed that a certain stonemason was spending a lot of time on one of the gargoyles that would adorn the very top of the cathedral. Wary of getting behind schedule, the foreman approached the stonemason and said, "Why are you spending so much time on this gargoyle? Don't you know that it's going to be so high up that it won't even be visible to the people below." And the stonemason replied, "I'm not doing this for the people below."

Whatever we do, we can do it to the glory of God. We can use all our strengths to do the tasks before us. It's possible to sell tires for the glory of God, to prepare tax returns for the glory of God, to work in our gardens to the glory of God. "This is for you, God." When you live in light of God's purpose for you, your focus changes from "How much pleasure am I getting out of life?" to "How much pleasure is God getting out of my life?" When we give God our lives, we are doing what the Creator created us to do.

"I'm not doing this for the people below." What could make God happier than one of his children giving him a gift? This week, do the one thing that will bring God the most pleasure in all the world. When you wake up each morning, simply say, "This is for you, God" and let your day be an act of worship.